

ADVANCING THE MORMON FRONTIER

The Life And Times
of
JOSEPH STACY MURDOCK
Pioneer, Colonizer, Peacemaker

By

George A. Thompson *- now deceased
May 1995*



Albert Alma (Ab) Murdock
Son of Joseph & Pernetta Murdock, murdered in 1911
(Author)

daughters lived nearly as long, Margaret living to age 79 and Jane to age 92. Although Dave lived to be 96, he was active to the last. At an age when most men would take it a little easy, Dave went into the mountains where he cut his own logs to build the biggest barn in the valley. He would ride his horse to town each day, ramrod straight, although he had trouble holding the reins, for all of his fingers had been broken while playing with the city's hardball team, and he had let them heal without setting the broken bones. When he was 87 years old, Dr. Dannenberg told him he would have to stop riding horses, so Dave bought a bicycle! He was planning to learn to fly when he died at age 96.

Dave was a little irreverent, and like Nymphus he sometimes had an "eye-opener" in the morning. Many stories are told about Dave, but a family favorite is about one particularly hard winter when nearly everyone was out of hay for their livestock. One day Dave's poor old mother told him she needed some hay, so Dave agreed to bring her a wagon load. A few days later "Grandma Jane" told him that the hay was mouldy and that her cows wouldn't eat it. "*Heck, I know that,*" Dave said, "*My cows wouldn't eat it either!*"

On June 23rd, 1911 Ab was murdered by Alvin Scruggs near Dave's Red Creek ranch. Scruggs claimed that Ab had stolen a horse from him in Wyoming. Scruggs said that he lay in wait at Red Creek until Ab and Scott, Dave's son, then only a boy, rode down a dugway to the river. Scruggs claimed that Ab reached for a gun, so he had to kill him. In court Scott later testified that Ab was unarmed and Alphonso, who arrived on the scene shortly after the murder also testified that Ab did not have a weapon. Scruggs was arrested on a complaint signed by John H., but he was released on \$1,000 bond. In court Deputy Sheriff Gundmundson related that he had issued Scruggs a deputy's badge when he passed through Heber, therefore Judge Clegg ruled that there was no cause for action against Scruggs and released him.

Al Scruggs had killed five men in Wyoming before he killed Ab, but although John H. and his brothers all knew the trial was only a farce, they realized that because of the court's feelings about Ab's previous conviction at Manti and because he was "only an Indian" they could never get a conviction against Scruggs. The Salt Lake Tribune pretty well described how hopeless their case would be if appealed to a higher court. A Tribune editorial said, "*Scruggs had*

*the drop on the half-breed, and with one rifle shot Murdock was on his way to the happy hunting ground!"*¹⁰ It was the end of the trail for Ab.

In 1908 Nymphus moved from his Charleston home to Heber City with his first wife Sarah, having given his second wife Esther a church-approved divorce. Nymphus installed one of the then newfangled telephones in his Heber home, but Sarah wouldn't use it because she said it was like talking to the dead! Nymphus had always been a poor man's philosopher, and some of his sayings are worth repeating. He said, *"I'd rather be a big toad in a little pond than be a little toad in a big pond, that's why I moved from Salt Lake City to Charleston."* He didn't think it was possible to get much work from a boy if more than one was hired, saying, *"One boy is a boy, two boys equal half a boy and three boys are the same as no boy at all!"* Another philosophy he shared was, *"A poor man has but one dog, while a poverty stricken man has two dogs, and a beggar has all the dogs he can get. You can always tell how poor a man is by the number of dogs he has!"*¹¹

His wife Sarah died in 1909 and after being married to two wives for most of his life, Nymphus was lonely, so in 1913 when he was 80 years old he married Elizibeth Green, who was then 75. After the ceremony he announced to his family and friends that he and Elizibeth had decided not to have any children! Four years later, on April 19th, 1917 Nymphus died at home. His last dying act was to give his son Joseph a Patriarchal Blessing. He had been a pioneer from the same mold as Joseph Murdock. He had been a pioneer, legislator, sheriff, militiaman, and Black Hawk War veteran as well as a prominent businessman. When he died he left an estate of \$40,000, a fortune at that time. One of his own sayings described him best, and was a fitting eulogy. *"When I die I will have ten years of work planned!"*¹²

With neither Joseph nor Nymphus to care for him, poor Benny Norris became even more of a burden for Jane and Elizibeth. In his old age he had to be cared for constantly. He lived to be 81 years old, dying on October 13th, 1921. He was the last tie with the Murdock's New York State home.

10. Salt Lake Tribune, June 26th, 1911.

11. Men Of The Rockies, Pg. 58, Hanks, 1944.

12. Ibid, Pg. 57.

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The life of Joseph Stacy Murdock was a life of adventure, and the times in which he lived spanned an era from the first western settlement to the dawn of the twentieth century, from Indian villages to modern cities, from ox teams to gas buggies. Although he lived and talked with Prophet Joseph, his last child died as recently as 1966. Joseph Murdock and all of his immediate family are gone now, but his heritage still lives on, forever remembered on the rolls of the Utah pioneers, and in names as solid and everlasting as Murdock Mountain. His memory will last as long as the mountain lasts.

Stephen R. Murdock

Stephen Royal Murdock, 84, died May 6, 1995 in St. George, Utah. Born January 16, 1911 in Provo, Utah, to Royal Joseph and Virginia Chipman Murdock. He married Virginia Madsen in 1936 and their marriage was later solemnized in the Manti LDS Temple. She died January 19, 1987. He married Elza Watkins Lee March 6, 1987 in the St. George LDS Temple. He was owner and operator of



American Oil Distributorship in American Fork. He was a High Priest in the LDS Church and had served a mission to England. He was also a charter member of the Lion's Club. He is survived by his wife of Orem; a son, Paul and wife Deanna Murdock, of American Fork, and a daughter, Mrs. Craig (Cheryl) Farrell, of Smithfield; three stepchildren: Mrs. Hugh (Deanna) Haws, Riverton; E.J. Lee, Murray; Mrs. Craig (Linda) Smith, Pleasant Grove. 24 grandchildren, 41 great grandchildren; a sister, Mrs. Preston (Maurine) Hughes, Spanish Fork. Funeral Services will be Wednesday, 11 a.m. in the Anderson & Sons Mortuary, 49 E. 100 North, American Fork, where friends may call one hour prior to services. Burial, American Fork Cemetery.